

SAASS 632

FOUNDATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

AY 21
October 5 - 30



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SAASS 632: Foundations of International Politics

Course description and objectives: According to the prominent international relations scholar John Mearsheimer, “All students and practitioners of international politics rely on theories to comprehend their surroundings. Some are aware of it and some are not, but there is no escaping the fact that we could not make sense of the complex world around us without simplifying theories.” The same can be said of the military strategist. Accordingly, this course introduces you to theories of international politics used to assess strategic problems in the international arena. The rationale for this course stems from the conviction that one cannot do strategy without a working knowledge of international politics and all that is encompassed within the field that explores relationships between nation-states.

The course is divided into three blocks. The first provides an overview of international relations/politics as it has developed in the modern era. From this development, we consider the most dominant theories/perspectives in the field to learn about their assumptions, primary areas of concern, and what they offer with respect to explaining the political environment we observe around us. The second block focuses on the roles and limits of coercion within international politics. It is the use of coercion and military force that most of the theories in the first block grapple with, particularly in terms of how states straddle the line between conflict and cooperation. As a result, we will spend time pondering some of the challenges states face addressing one of their most important tasks, the provision of security for their citizens. In the final block we turn toward a more practical understanding of how theory informs real world international relations, focusing on the nature of great power competition both at the regional and systemic levels. Regionally, we will examine great power dynamics in East Asia to gain a sense of what is at stake, and what possible futures might exist as a result of the competition primarily (though not exclusively) between China and the United States. Systemically, we take a closer look at whether there is a true shift toward bi-polarity and if so, the implications of this shift, as well as the implications of a shift in which China is the more dominant power compared to the United States. Our assessments at both the regional and systemic levels leave us with questions of how such assessments inform our development of strategy vis-à-vis China for the foreseeable future.

Expectations and alibis: If theories of international politics are unfamiliar to you, be forewarned: the literature on this subject can be intimidating. Remember, however, we are on a journey. It is a journey you will find both rewarding *and* challenging. This course is a bit different from what you’ve been doing thus far, both in approach and substance. Be sure to give yourself time to adjust if this is a new area of study.

That said, while we only skim the surface of what a full-fledged IR graduate seminar would cover, in terms of time and design, this course is geared toward making you a better strategist. To this end, we focus on theory and assessment, particularly in those areas that are most important for your development as a strategist. Recall, a theory is a picture—mentally formed—of a bounded realm or domain of activity. Theories explain things. They do so by isolating one realm of activity from another. Though not divorced from the real world of experiment and observation, theories are only indirectly connected to it. Thus, theories are never said to be ‘true.’ We judge theories in terms of their usefulness. What we want to know then is what does a theory seek to explain and how useful is that explanation?

In terms of assessment, a crude but effective way to assess theories of international politics is to test them against the world around you. At present, the US, China, North Korea, Russia, Iran, Ukraine, and the European Union are in the news. How does a strategist sort through the noise to get at the heart of explaining the various issues that are international politics? Theories help—they allow one to focus on a small number of big and important things with strategic significance. They are only as helpful though as the level of diligence you provide in assessing a problem holistically, with theory serving as a useful guide of things to focus upon.

To help you develop this analytic skill, we will examine world events in class regularly. Keep up with current events by reading *The New York Times*; it is the paper of record. *The Wall Street Journal* is also excellent as are other sources such as *The Economist*, *National Review*, *The New Republic* or *Foreign Affairs*, to name but a few. Journals such as *International Security*, *International Organization*, or *International Studies Quarterly* represent the latest research in the field. Lastly, get in the habit of visiting the websites of institutions and organizations like the UN, NATO, WTO, ASEAN, EU, UNASUR, Amnesty International, and the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists.

As you read the selections for this course, it will become quite clear to you that the range of international politics in terms of perspective and prescription is great. While you undoubtedly will gravitate more toward some positions than others, I encourage you to keep an open mind and to identify and acknowledge the strengths and weaknesses of all the material. This demands mental stamina and a lot of hard work on your part. The reward is a foundation from which to evaluate future research that will enhance your development as a strategist.

Course Assignment: You will write an **original ten-page paper** that makes a clear argument **addressing a topic to be provided NLT Tuesday, 20 Oct.** The paper will be written in Times New Roman font, size 12, with one-inch margins on all sides. Endnotes are allowed and do not count against the page limit, but they should consist primarily of references and not include substantial explanatory text. **The paper is due to your professor by 1600L on Friday, 30 Oct.**

Grading: Your final grade will be based on seminar participation (40%) and the written assignment (60%). If you are in doubt as to how you measure up in seminar participation, speak with your professor.

Readings: The following is the list of books used for the course:

Blackwill, Robert D. and Jennifer M. Harris. 2016. *War by Other Means: Geoeconomics and Statecraft*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

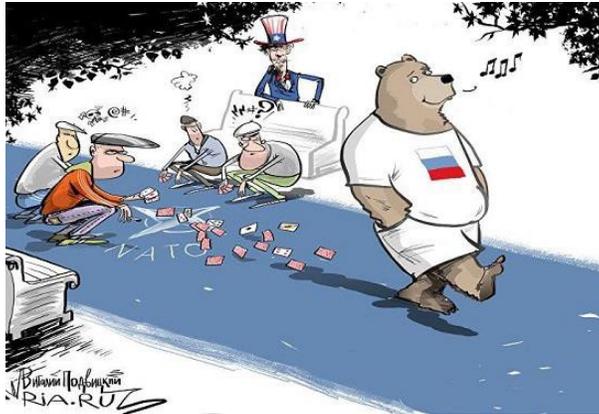
Buzan, Barry and George Lawson. 2015. *The Global Transformation: History, Modernity and the Making of International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Copeland, Dale C. 2015. *Economic Interdependence and War*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Gilpin, Robert. 1981. *War and Change in World Politics*. New York: Cambridge.
- Greenhill, Kelly and Peter Krause, eds. *The Power to Hurt in International Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ikenberry, G. John. 2011. *Liberal Leviathan. The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Keohane, Robert O. 2005. *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Mahbubani, Kishore. 2020. *Has China Won?: The Chinese Challenge to American Primacy*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Mearsheimer, John J. 2001. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: WW Norton.
- Narang, Vipin. 2014. *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era. Regional Powers and International Conflict*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Raymond, Mark. 2019. *Social Practices of Rule-Making in World Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Schelling, Thomas. 1966. *Arms and Influence*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Tannenwald, Nina. 2007. *The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons Since 1945*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Waltz, Kenneth. 2001. *Man, the State and War. A Theoretical Analysis*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Yeo, Andrew. 2019. *Asia's Regional Architecture: Alliances and Institutions in the Pacific Century*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

The remainder of the syllabus includes the class schedule including topics and readings, along with a short description of them. Come prepared to engage and to be enlightened (hopefully). On behalf of my fellow instructors, we look forward to 15 fun-filled days of international politics.

Welcome to 632!



Class Schedule – Topics and Readings

BLOCK 1: Modern International Relations and IR Theory

5 Oct – The Development of Modern International Relations

Readings (1): Buzan and Lawson, *The Global Transformation: History, Modernity and the Making of International Relations*

Buzan and Lawson provide a nice introduction to the study of international relations. Their main argument focuses on the concept of the ‘long nineteenth century’ and its impact on international relations today. In reading this, there are several things to consider that merit discussion. First, how compelling is their argument? What evidence and logic do they provide and how does this evidence comport with your own understanding of international relations? In what ways is the 19th century a useful historical period to consider in the 21st? In what ways is it not? Additionally, in reading this book, one should get a sense for some of the larger themes in international politics. What are the main political units in international politics? How have the roles of these units changed? How has power transformed in the international system? What impacts have globalization and modernization wielded on the international stage? Why is the notion of core and periphery relations important? What about sovereignty? How has it changed over time? Finally, how persistent are some of the 19th century ideologies in the 21st and how are they manifest today?

6 Oct – International Politics as a Systemic Problem: The Origins of Neorealism

Readings (1): Waltz, *Man, the State and War*

Waltz’s work represents the beginning of the neo-realist tradition in IR. Dissatisfied with the nature of explanations regarding the origins of war, Waltz analyzes three images or levels of analysis with respect to understanding conflict between states. This work lays the foundation for what he develops as a theory of international politics, known to us today as defensive realism. While this book does not develop the theory itself (see *Theory of International Politics*), it allows the reader to consider the various ways in which one might answer the question: From where do the major causes of war originate? Building on the writings of political philosophers, Waltz begins an analysis that offers to the reader the importance of the international system as a major cause of conflict, separate from other levels such as the individual (e.g. nature of man) and the state (e.g. domestic causes). In considering this piece, think about your own thoughts on what drives conflict between states. How does this perception fit with what Waltz offers? Is the idea of systemic factors

driving the relations between states plausible? Do policymakers act as if this is the case?

8 Oct – Realist Theory: Offensive Realism and Great Power Competition

Readings (1): Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*

In this book, Mearsheimer presents the theory of ‘Offensive Realism.’ One of his central claims is that great powers consistently look for opportunities to gain power at another’s expense. In other words, great powers strive for more power; they do not ‘naturally’ balance against it. This contrasts with what Waltz derived from his own theory of international politics. The result is a world characterized by fear, mistrust, instability, and aggression. Do Mearsheimer’s predictions necessarily flow from his underlying assumptions? Must concerns over survival mandate aggressive state behavior? What strategies stem from the tenets of Offensive Realism? What world events over the past five years either support or undermine Mearsheimer’s logic?

9 Oct – Hegemonic Stability Theory

Readings (1): Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (skip epilogue)

Gilpin makes three main claims in this book: strong states seek hegemony, wars result from certainty, and peaceful change is rare. Nonetheless, there is utility in hegemony as it provides an elegant answer to the ‘order problem’. Must international order be dependent upon a hegemon? Is the United States a declining hegemon? If so, what are the implications for international politics? What strategies stem from hegemonic stability theory? How do the arguments here contrast with Mearsheimer’s expectations?

12 Oct – Federal Holiday

13 Oct - Cooperation through Institutions

Readings (1): Keohane, *After Hegemony*

What if there is no hegemon? Should one assume that states cannot cooperate without a powerful state enforcer? Keohane explains cooperation through the use of institutions. While realism suggests cooperation is transient and power politics creates conditions that make other states untrustworthy, Keohane argues that institutions are mechanisms that can mitigate anarchical conditions. As a result, institutions are key actors in the international system and will remain so in the absence of a hegemon. Today, there is little doubt about the power of institutions in the international system. Which institutions matter and why, however, remain contentious questions. Keohane focuses on power and interest in driving cooperation. Might there be other factors? Are institutions merely reflective of state power and interest or do they have independent effects on state interactions in ways similar to how realists discuss international structure? *After Hegemony* begins this discussion and shapes much of how we think about institutions today, liberal or otherwise.

15 Oct – Liberal Theory: Liberal International Order

Readings (1): Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan*

We continue our discussion of institutions but in a very specific context. Neo-liberal institutionalism is the contemporary expression of liberal thought and builds upon Keohane's own work on regimes. Ikenberry focuses on economic interactions, international institutions and the relationships among the great powers. That each set of factors play a role in international politics is hard to deny, but do they play 'the' causal role? What is the significance and role of institutions in US grand strategy, for example? Is the American built and led order durable? What are the primary risks and challenges to this order and its associated institutions? Can other institutions replace the 'liberal' ones established by the US and its allies? How might Keohane argue in response to Ikenberry's argument? What would Gilpin have to say here regarding the future of the international system?

16 Oct – Constructivist Theory: Rule Making in the International System

Readings (1): Raymond, *Social Practices of Rule-Making in World Politics*

The constructivist approach brings the concepts of norms, rules, and identity to the discussion of international politics. In short, constructivists argue that these concepts are critical to understanding and explaining relationships between actors in the international system. Constructivists consider these relationships to be social in nature and thus intersubjective. In today's reading, we focus on rule-making, rule interpretation, and rule application. While the previous works on realism and liberalism implicitly or explicitly identify rules as being important in shaping the expectations of behavior, these theoretical approaches remain wedded to explanations based on power dynamics or cooperation through shared interests. Raymond makes the case that rule-making constitutes a pattern of social interactions between actors in the international system and is subject to change based on factors beyond power and institutions. Understanding patterns of interactions within the context of shared knowledge between actors can help us better identify when and how changes to the "ground rules" in the system might occur. As you read the case studies, consider the various ways in which actors sought to change the rules of the system and how others responded to these efforts based on the social processes that were used in the effort. This examination of rule-making, rule interpretation and rule application very much should be of concern to strategists today, as countries like China and Russia continue to socialize possible changes to the basic rules by which states interact. What lessons can we take away from the case studies in this regard? How might Raymond's overall argument better enlighten our understanding of these countries' current efforts?

19 Oct – Constructivist Theory: Norms

Readings (1): Tannenwald, *The Nuclear Taboo*

Why have nuclear weapons not been used in conflict since WWII? Tannenwald argues that deterrence as a concept is not sufficient as an explanation. While we examine deterrence in subsequent seminars, we turn our attention here to the idea that norms (in this case a non-use norm) provide powerful disincentives to engage in certain types of behavior. If Tannenwald's argument is correct, the identification of norms becomes important in providing alternative explanations of actors' behaviors in international politics. In considering Tannenwald's evidence for her case, reflect on the previous seminar. What is the relationship between rules and norms? What rules exist

regarding nuclear weapons that are shared by nuclear and non-nuclear powers? How does understanding these rules provide some sense as to the strength of the norm of non-use? Finally, as we turn our attention to deterrence in the next section, are the conditions identified by Tannenwald since 1945 still in place, or have there been efforts to socialize a different role for nuclear weapons in the international system beyond deterrence? If so, by whom and what are the potential implications of these efforts? How can they be countered?

BLOCK 2: Coercion in International Politics

20 Oct – Logic of Military Coercion

Readings (2): Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (Chapters 1-4)

Talmadge, Caitlin. 2017. "Would China Go Nuclear? Assessing the Risk of Chinese Nuclear Escalation in a Conventional War with the United States." *International Security* 41(4): 50-92.

Today's readings begin a block focused more narrowly on the logic and utility of military coercion within the international domain, starting with the iconic Thomas Schelling. Schelling's work leads us to consider the role of bargaining and the impact of the threat of violence on bargaining. Taken together, some might label this 'the diplomacy of violence.' Can such threats lead to peace and security in the international system? What sorts of mechanisms and/or factors are required to make this work? What is the difference between coercion and deterrence? What can we learn from past attempts at military coercion? Do nuclear weapons matter? How do they change the deterrence calculus?

To this end, Talmadge's work moves us away from abstract theory to a practical concern regarding the ability of the US to influence China through the use or threat of violence. Specifically, she examines the conditions under which China might engage in nuclear escalation with the US in a conventional war. How do her arguments about China's escalatory strategy comport with Schelling's discussion of coercion and compellence? What lessons might we take away from this study in considering military options against another nuclear state in the future? Is the China problem similar to the USSR threat to which Schelling speaks? How so? Why not?

22 Oct – Nuclear Strategies and Posturing by Regional Powers

Readings (1): Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era* (Chapters 1-5, 7, 9-11)

We continue with nukes but move beyond deterrence and US strategy exclusively to consider how states with small nuclear arsenals develop strategies and why they choose the ones they do. Narang presents an explanation of these choices through what he labels 'Posture Optimization Theory'. What does this theory explain actually? What postures are available? What differences exist between the various states he considers in his discussion as they relate to nuclear strategy? How does the development of nuclear arsenals among smaller states affect deterrence calculations? How does Narang test his argument? How do regional dynamics affect postures? Are there any takeaways regarding the impact of nuclear postures on non-proliferation in the international system? Given the US approach to nuclear weapons, should policymakers expect small states to behave differently than what Narang argues? In which cases? Why?

23 Oct – The Use and Limits of Coercion

Readings (1): Greenhill and Krause, eds., *Coercion: The Power to Hurt in International Politics* (Chapters 1, 2, 4, 5, 9, 11-13, 15)

Greenhill and Krause offer a comprehensive study of coercion, going beyond the use of force to include other ways states can hurt an adversary. We use an edited volume here in an effort to survey the broad range of coercion options available to states, noting that while our previous concerns derived from an interest in nuclear weapons, coercion in the modern era involves the full range of a state's resources to modify the behaviors of others. In the interest of your sanity, we will limit the discussion of this edited volume to the coercion topics most important to consider in the current international context. Consider the concept of coercion going back to Schelling. What are the various ways coercion is operationalized in the chapters? Are the authors consistent in their understanding of the concept and how they operationalize it? What makes coercion effective? What factors limit the ability of the US to engage in coercion? How should one consider the different types of instruments of coercion in terms of when they are best utilized? In reading these contributions, you should come away with a sense of how difficult coercion is for even a powerful state like the US, but also how widespread the use of coercion is when one considers the many ways countries have the "power to hurt". Consider the historical examples used and how they might have implications for some of our potential targets of coercion today, or even for how states may seek to coerce the US and its allies.

26 Oct – Economic Statecraft and Geoeconomics

Readings (1): Blackwill and Harris, *War by Other Means*

Blackwill and Harris identify an aspect of coercive influence often overlooked. The concept of 'geoeconomics' and statecraft are both making a considerable impact on how states view the range of power and capabilities at their disposal, particularly ones that are less likely to lead to the use of violence. What is geoeconomics? What is statecraft? The authors note the difficulty facing the US in employing economic means to achieve geopolitical ends, even though other states like Russia and China appear to be very adept at doing so. How does this inability to engage in geoeconomics as effectively as others impact US power vis-à-vis these other actors? Are Blackwill and Harris' claims too strong regarding the power of economic statecraft? Tying this discussion to the previous discussions of coercion, does the ability to engage in geoeconomics still rely on the ability to employ force? How might the US better utilize its economic power to coerce or influence others more than it has historically? Are there any reasons such efforts might be limited? If so, what are they?

BLOCK 3: Regional and Systemic Great Power Competition

27 Oct – Economic Interdependence and Great Power Conflict

Readings (1): Copeland, *Economic Interdependence and War* (Intro, Chapters 1-4, 6, 9)

Most recently, globalization has had powerful influences on state decision making. With states concerned over unequal distributions of benefits, some have asked whether states' foreign

economic policies are pushing toward greater competition and potential conflict. A considerable volume of IR scholarship examines the relationship between economics and conflict, but to date the results have been mixed. Copeland's work provides a new take on the issue of economic interdependence and its influence on conflict. He points to expectations as driving the behaviors of actors in ways that potentially lead to peaceful arrangements or international crises. Such work is important to consider given that thoughts of globalization as positive, benign or simply affecting the international economy seem too simplistic. Does economic integration reduce the likelihood of military conflict? What are the implications of current trends in globalization for international politics? Does history effectively inform us about the future we are likely to observe as it relates to economic interdependence and conflict?

29 Oct – Great Power Competition at the Regional Level: The Case of East Asia

Readings (1): Yeo, *Asia's Regional Architecture*

Using a historical institutionalist approach, Yeo traces the impact of early 20th century institution building on the current organization of institutions and alliances in the Pacific region today. A few points merit mentioning when considering this book. First, note how Yeo moves away from traditional IR theory to explain current dynamics in the Pacific. How does this approach compare with earlier theoretical arguments? Second, the author draws some interesting conclusions about the constraints placed on actors in the region based on existing structures. What implications do you derive from these conclusions as they relate to the ability of states like China, or North Korea to effect change? More specifically, how do current efforts to create alternative institutions and possible architectures fit into this discussion? What then can we claim about the future of regional order in East Asia and subsequently, about international order more broadly? Does the current structure in the region as detailed by Yeo provide opportunities to engage in rule-making in ways consistent with Raymond's work?

30 Oct – China and the International System

Readings (1): Mahbubani, *Has China Won?*

We end our course with a final discussion about China, the country that seemingly matters most for the United States and its global, strategic interests. Rather than just talking about what China is doing, however, Mahbubani pushes us to consider what the United States must do to compete with China strategically across several dimensions of competition. In some ways, the points Mahbubani brings out forces us to contextualize the strategic problem of China much like we did with the Soviet Union. Indeed, many people in the security community increasingly seem willing to identify China in these terms. You may be one of these people. In any event, I ask that you consider whether the circumstances that created the Cold War are similar to the current international system. If so, how are they similar and what does Mahbubani point to that provides a strong rationale for viewing China in such a stark contrast to the United States and its allies? If the system is not similar, what (beyond the simple Thucydides Trap) do we risk in the possible evolution of a larger groupthink dynamic where this image of China overrides any other perspective?

Closing Remarks

International politics is complicated and messy, yet understanding the international political environment is essential to developing good strategy. The use of theory should be a valuable tool in this regard, but it is important to recognize that the simplicity of theory can be for the foolhardy. While theory provides a way of reducing complexity, no one theory can provide answers for a strategist. Rather, theories should help effectively develop the framing of problem

sets in such a way as to illuminate multiple perspectives on any given strategic issue. In turn, such framing increases the likelihood of better decisions and outcomes (we hope). For a strategist, while the study of international politics is difficult to be sure, we hope that this course has shown you that it is well worth the effort.

“[When asked “Dr. Einstein, why is it that when the mind of man has stretched so far as to discover the structure of the atom, we have been unable to devise the political means to keep the atom from destroying us?”]

“That is simple, my friend. It is because politics is more difficult than physics.”

